

# PCD NEWSLETTER

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## Director's Corner

Dear members of the Division of Precision and Computational Diagnostics (PCD),



Welcome to the 20th issue of our Divisional Newsletter. The state of the world and our health system has changed significantly since our last publication prior to the pandemic, but our division has persevered. We are excited to welcome four "new" members to our division, though a few have in fact been with us for many months now. Alison DeBlass, Stefanie Shawver, Susan Nedumakel and Corey Rogers join us from various backgrounds bringing their diverse talents to the division.

Please join me in congratulating Dr. Salvatore Priore on his appointment to assistant professor within our division! He has been an important member of our team since his fellowship, and we are delighted that he is staying on. He officially started at the beginning of the new academic year. With him, we also welcome two new Molecular Genetic Pathology fellows. Be sure to read all about our fellows, old and new, on page 2.

During our hiatus, there has been one thing engaging the thoughts, time, and efforts of the members of our Division with pointed impact on Molecular Pathology: COVID-19. Our health system would not have been able to return to normal operations without the tireless efforts of every single person on that team. We are proud of our response to this mission critical need and owe a debt of gratitude to our colleagues in PCD and our colleagues in Microbiology as well as the entire department and UPHS for their support. Turn to page 3 to see the faces of our "COVID Heroes".

Additional items covered in this issue include good news from division members as well as answers to a very important question: If you could have any superpower, what would it be? The answers will amuse and surprise you on page 4.

These are unprecedented times. Now more than ever our commitment to excellence and patient care are being noticed and put to the test. Gratitude does not begin to describe what is owed to each and every division member for their grit and ability to adapt over that past 6 months. Thank you.

Kojo Elenitoba-Johnson, MD

## Welcome to the Faculty, Dr. Priore!



Congratulations, Dr. Priore on officially joining our PCD faculty as an assistant professor. Dr. Priore is very familiar with our division as he did his residency in Penn's Pathology and Laboratory medicine department, followed by a year as one of our esteemed MGP Fellows from 2018-2019. During the 2019-2020 academic year he remained close to our division as an instructor of Clinical Pathology and Laboratory Medicine for PSOM as he continued to work closely with our faculty and staff on various projects. We are so happy to finally welcome him as part of our faculty. His talent and attention to detail have already made a remarkable addition to our division where he is serving all three laboratories within our division, (CPD, Cytogenetics, Molecular Pathology)!

## Welcome

### Alison DeBlass

Alison is a new technologist for the Center for Personal Diagnostics.



Alison graduated from Towson University with a Bachelor of Science in Cell and Molecular Biology. Since then, she has worked in various laboratories, both clinical and research, as a molecular technologist. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, friends, and her pets. She also enjoys reading and traveling whenever she gets the chance.

### Stefanie Shawver

Stefanie is the new accessioner for the Center for Personal Diagnostics.



Stefanie received her bachelor's degree from Weidner University in criminal justice with a minor in psychology. She is currently working on her associates degree in Science with plans to become a certified histotech. Since getting her B.A. she has worked as a medical assistant and receptionist in various doctors' offices. In her most recent position at Pennsylvania Centre for Dermatology she was also a Mohs Histotechnician. She is bringing lots of diverse experience to the position. In her free time she loves to cook, work on home improvement projects and spend time in Cape May.

### Susan Nedumakel

Susan is the new technical supervisor for the Cytogenetics lab.



Susan received her Bachelors of Science in Biology at Binghamton University and completed the Cytogenetics Program at UT MD Anderson Texas. She has worked in the field of Cytogenetics for 13 years, most recently as the Cytogenetics Lab Supervisor at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital. When not in the lab, she enjoys running, cooking and spending time with her kids.

### Corey Rogers

Corey is a new Genomic Development Specialist for the Center for Personalized Diagnostics.



Corey received his bachelor's degree from La Salle University in Biology. He then attended Thomas Jefferson University and received his Ph.D. in Biochemistry and Molecular Pharmacology. Before joining us here at Penn, he worked as a Research Scientist at a biotech company in Ewing, NJ called CelOxess where he helped to develop a clinical assay to measure reproductive health. In his free time, Corey loves to cook, play board games, travel, and exercise.

# NOTABLE EVENTS

## Goodbye Fellows



In June, we said goodbye to our 2019-2020 MGP fellows, Sofia Garces Narvaez and Ju Yoon-Yoon. Scott Weidamoyer, our excellent MGP Fellowship coordinator, worked closely with Sofia and Ju-Yoon and had this to say:

*"From our first meeting, until the last week of their service, I enjoyed the time that I spent with both of them and they were a pleasure to work with."*

Their departure is bittersweet. Although we are sad to see them go, we are excited for the new opportunities they are setting out for. Sofia will be taking on a roll as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Hematopathology, Division of Pathology/Lab Medicine at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston Texas. Ju-Yoon will be heading to the Brigham & Women's Hospital (Boston, MA), where he will be pursuing his second fellowship in Women's & Perinatal Pathology (i.e. gynecological and placental pathology).

Ju Yoon shared this parting note with us:

*"The last four months of my MGP training were particularly challenging, having been separated from my wife and son. Luckily, I had the fortune of working with a good group of people, and I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone for your support. Thank you!"*



Although we were not able to gather in person, members of the division gathered virtually, via zoom, to celebrate their successful year and wish them well as they head off. (Pictured above)

## Welcome Fellows

In July we welcomed two brand new Molecular Genetic Pathology Fellows to our Division. In their few short months here, they have already begun working on various projects with faculty and staff, educating other trainees, and contributing to the division in meaningful ways. We are excited for what the rest of the academic year has in store. Read on to "meet" them, and find out their answers to some fun questions asked by Scott Weidamoyer!



**Name:** Waqas Mahmud  
**Hometown:** Lahore, Pakistan  
**Last Position Held:** Resident, Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, IL

**If you could breed two animals together to defy the laws of nature what new animal would you create?**

A bird and a fish to create a fish that could fly.

**What is something you get wrong almost every time you do it?**

Chocolate lava cake. Never get the lava right!

**What weird food combinations do you really enjoy?**

Mexican and Korean food...Seoul Taco!

**What personality trait has gotten you in the most trouble?**

To almost always say "yes" and never say "no".

**What is the best piece of advice you've received?**

"Be Yourself!"



**Name:** Neha Gupta  
**Hometown:** Jammu, J&K, India  
**Last Position Held:** Hematopathology Fellow, University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA

**If you could breed two animals together to defy the laws of nature what new animal would you create?**

Not a big fan of pets or animals, so none!

**What is something you get wrong almost every time you do it?**

I always type "i" instead of "o" because they are so close on the keyboard! Never get it right.

**What weird food combinations do you really enjoy?**

Never gave this much thought.

**What personality trait has gotten you in the most trouble?**

Perfectionism.

**What is the best piece of advice you've received?**

"Do what you want to, even if it might not seem right at the time, so you don't regret it later." Although I don't follow it all the time....

# NOTABLE EVENTS

## COVID-19 HEROES

These past 6 months have certainly been "unprecedented times". Departments and divisions across the hospital turned to telehealth to keep patients at home, staff and faculty were told to work from home, research was shutdown, elective surgeries cancelled...even volume in the CPD and Cytogenetics took a dive, but one department, Molecular Pathology, took on more responsibility than ever in response to the pandemic.

Within days of the onset and rapid spread of SARS CoV-2 (widely known as COVID-19) which caused the emergency shut down across Pennsylvania, the faculty and staff in Molecular Pathology had stood up multiple assays and began testing patients across the health system in conjunction with the Microbiology department who run two of the now SEVEN assays to help handle the volume of patients, both symptomatic and asymptomatic.

This was no small feat. Faculty and staff worked tirelessly as the lab was turned into a 24 hour wet lab with technologists (including borrowed techs from other labs) taking turns on 12 hour shifts, stretched thin to respond to the overwhelming need from the health system. Volume quickly surged, and to date, they are testing between 1,600-2,000 samples per day across their seven assays. Daily COVID development meetings and lab huddles are held to respond to the ever changing landscape of the virus and needs of the health system. Each assay, requiring different work flow and expertise, has to be mastered and kept running by staff, in case one fails or resources (which are scarce) runs out.

Their lives, both work and personal, are consumed by COVID but they keep showing up and doing what is asked of them. The faculty and staff of Molecular Pathology quickly became our "COVID-19 Heroes". Their lab coats might as well be capes. Our health system has slowly resumed normal operations over the summer. This could not have been done without the rapid response and effort put forth by Molecular Pathology, who have tested over 200,000 samples to date! Take a look at the faces of our heroes below.



Viviana Van Deerlin



Chris Watt



Alicia Carlin



Emily Collins



Tom DiBello



Caren Gentile



Sarah Herlihy



Linette Johnson



Kelly King



Zhenying Liu



Jennifer Resling



Monica Shah



Jen Smith



Jessica Sondermann



Jennifer Strubinger



Gary Tang



Cooper Terry



Nicole Yap



Chris Leid



Natalie Opsitnick



Alison DeBlass



Joe Milano



Coral Holly



Samantha Maynes



Claire Verrico



Faye Sheinman



Emily Kamieniecki



Emily Rabut



Jannatul Ferdaus



Amy Khalid



Zoe Lee



Tyler Marmo



Jessica Rainey



Cartoon by Jason Limbo

# SOCIAL EVENTS



## GOOD NEWS

The world is currently a crazy place, and its been a while since we've put out a newsletter, but in that time a lot of good things have been happening for members of our Division!



Jen Smith, lab manager for Molecular Pathology, earned her MBA! Congratulations Jen! Members of the Mol Path lab threw her a small pot luck lunch to celebrate this achievement. It couldn't have been easy completing her program (from Holy Family University) at the onset of a pandemic, but she did!



David Lieberman and his wife welcomed a son to their, now, family of six! Sebastian Elias Lieberman was born on 3/29/20 weighing 6lbs 15oz. Despite the difficult restrictions placed on labor and delivery in hospitals during COVID, he arrived happy and healthy and the whole family has been doing well! Sebastian, "Sebby," is now 6 months old!



## Question Corner



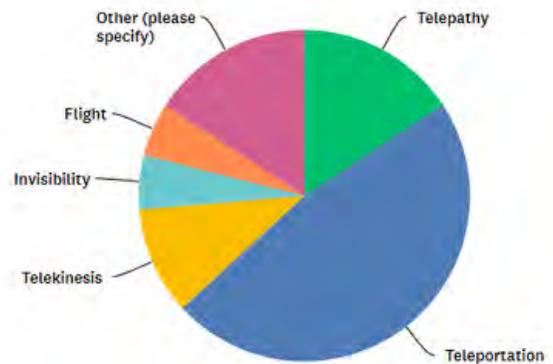
Members of the division were all asked the same question. They could either choose from a list of options or write in their own answer.

The question: ***If you could have any superpower what would it be?***

Some of the reasoning behind these answers is pretty convincing....

- "Memory manipulation. Being able to absorb knowledge such as physical fighting styles/unlocking passwords or deciphering languages and complicated social interactions; photographic memory; inducing and manifesting dreams and nightmares; you know standard superpower stuff..."
- "Teleportation. So I don't have to see or smell any of the interesting characters on the El when i commute for work."
- "Time Travel."
- "Teleportation. I'd like to think myself to my destination."
- "Telekinesis. It would save me a lot of time in the lab!"
- "Turning water into wine. Not much to explain...especially during COVID!"
- "Invisibility. You can't see my answer because I'm invisible!"
- "Teleportation. It would save so much time!"
- "Teleportation. Can live ANYWHERE and have a short commute to work!"
- "Flight. Pretty deathly afraid of heights, so I figure this will help limit my ability to exploit this for evil...always a potential occupational threat for the superhero crowd."
- "Telekinesis. I could automate the entirety of my job, my house would clean itself, and I'd never have to physically pick up after my dog :)"
- "Teleportation. I'd be able to be there in an instant when my kids need me."
- "Teleportation. That would be pretty handy for going between HUP, 3020, Rittenhouse, how many labs do we have now?"
- "Telepathy. Another field I was always interested in is Criminal Justice. I would use this power to make sure the truly guilty are held accountable and that the innocent are not wrongly accused."

While there were a variety of answers, the clear favorite was Teleportation!



## Wanted: Newsletter Volunteers

We are in search of some volunteers to help out with the Divisional Newsletter. If you have any interest in writing or design and want to an outlet to express your talents please email Samantha DiPompeo: [Samantha.DiPompeo@penmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:Samantha.DiPompeo@penmedicine.upenn.edu) or Scott Weidamoyer: [Scott.Weidamoyer@penmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:Scott.Weidamoyer@penmedicine.upenn.edu)

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